



**Leveling the  
Playing Field:**

# **Promoting Women's Economic Capabilities and Human Rights**

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## Preface

In 1995, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and The Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) began working in partnership to manage the “Promoting Women in Development” (PROWID) grants program, funded by the Office of Women in Development at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). PROWID was a four-year grants program that sought to improve the lives of women in developing countries and economies in transition by promoting development based on practical insights gained from field-tested interventions. PROWID grants supported 45 different activities implemented by partner organizations in over 30 countries, including action-oriented policy research, pilot interventions, and advocacy that contributed to economic and social development with women’s full participation.

PROWID projects were grouped into three broad crosscutting themes including economic growth and development; governance, civil society, and women’s leadership; and domestic violence against women. Additionally, a small number of projects were focused specifically on female genital cutting (FGC) and on the challenges and transformations for women in post-conflict transitions.

This paper is one of several analytical documents synthesizing the findings across PROWID projects and their implications within the various theme areas. Recognizing that such themes overlap in their contributions to development, PROWID project staff worked in consultation with the partner teams in the field to identify key lessons derived from their project experiences and formulate recommendations for improving the design and practice of development. An overarching “best practices” synthesis paper concludes the set of documents, placing PROWID findings within a framework of development envisioned as the progressive realization of human rights and structuring the full range of recommendations as a final programmatic contribution to the theory and practice of women in development.

All of the PROWID synthesis papers are available upon request from ICRW and CEDPA, and can also be found on-line at the web site of either organization. To visit the ICRW web site, go to <http://www.icrw.org>, click on “PROWID,” scroll down to “Publications,” and look for the *PROWID Synthesis Papers* section. To visit the CEDPA web site, go to <http://www.cedpa.org> and follow the PROWID Publications link. *Reports-in-Brief* providing summaries of each project supported by PROWID are also available from ICRW and CEDPA by request and on-line.



## Acknowledgments

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The authors also benefited from discussions and written contributions provided by members of ICRW and CEDPA who served as technical monitors working collaboratively with the project teams in the field. In particular, we would like to express our gratitude to Patricia Ahern, Dipasis Bhadra, Nata Duvvury, Simel Esim, Donna Flynn, Frances Houck, Charlotte Johnson-Welch, Julia Masterson, and Antonia Wolff. The document is stronger thanks to the intellectual advice and guidance provided by Geeta Rao Gupta and Rekha Mehra.

We express our deep gratitude to Carolyn Knapp and Nadia Steinzor for their own technical insights and expert writing skills, without which this present document would not exist. We also express our appreciation to Cheryl Silver for editing the document and Miriam Escobar for sustained administrative support throughout the life of the PROWID grants program.

While we are deeply thankful for all the support received in the preparation of this synthesis paper, we assume responsibility for any errors or oversights that it may contain.

# Executive Summary



**T**he last two decades have witnessed a striking evolution in the conception of not only human rights, but of development, as both relate to promoting the freedom, well-being and dignity of all people. The recent and ongoing convergence of these two approaches is invigorating the dialogue regarding the field of women in development, and reshaping policy and practice promoting women's advancement. Yet in many regions of the world, women's freedom to develop their full potential is constrained by socioeconomic and political norms and practices.

Development means more than economic growth and the fulfillment of basic needs such as adequate health care, nutrition, sanitation, and education. In his paradigm-shifting analysis, Amartya Sen considers development as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy (Sen 1999). This implies the interconnections between economic facilities, political freedoms, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security that influence the process of development, and which require a corresponding plurality of institutions.

Using a human rights and freedoms approach to development, this paper synthesizes the findings from a number of PROWID projects that explore women's economic roles and opportunities and their aspirations for advancement. It reviews the sorts of constraints they face in fulfilling them and considers the relationship between women's rights and capabilities on the one hand and development policy and practice on the other. The findings can be grouped into three broad categories:

- **Increasing local participation, building women's skills, and changing institutional norms and practices.**

One component of the process of supporting and expanding women's development freedoms involves two sorts of change; one initiated at the community level and the other directed toward institutional change at district, regional, and national levels. The first requires a community at the grassroots level (perhaps working in dialogue with a development organization) to identify an obstacle or deprivation impeding women's development, assess the needs and strengths of the community, and then facilitate the community's search for a realistic, sustainable solution. The second involves changing the conceptual framework and operating practices of institutions that shape the development path taken. The two levels of change are not mutually exclusive. Each of the four PROWID projects reviewed in this section relied on capacity building and community mobilization to end a pervasive sense of isolation, marginalization, and relative powerlessness among participants.

- **Expanding women's access to and control of productive resources and transforming the institutions that govern them.**

A second component related to women's human freedoms and economic advancement addresses the constraints affecting access to and control over productive assets. Many women find that their right to participate freely in economic interchange has been shaped, and often circumscribed, by societal values and norms that deny them access to and control over crucial productive resources for development. To ameliorate the existing inequality, we must institute what

Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996) refer to as “gender redistributive policies” that are intended to transform existing patterns of resource allocation in a more egalitarian direction. These relate to the full range of productive assets (e.g., land, labor, and financial capital) required by active participation in economic processes. The five PROWID projects summarized in this section demonstrate both the need and means to ensure women’s access to such assets.

● **Promoting gender equity in sustainable community management of natural resources.**

A third component of the process to expand women’s development freedoms demonstrated by PROWID projects (and related to the two already discussed) concerns strategies for sustainable development that rely on sound and equitable community management of natural resources. The participation of women in planning and carrying out baseline research, as well as participating in the choice and implementation of natural resource management interventions enhances their freedom to live in a secure, sustainable environment. Through a variety of means—including community education and organization, gains won from sustainable practices, and the application of appropriate technology benefiting households and communities—women rose to more prominent positions in their communities. The knowledge that women gained about their local environment and conservation contributed to innovative, effective approaches to the use of land and natural resources as demonstrated by the four PROWID projects reviewed in this section.

The results and lessons about women’s economic roles and advancement argue for a comprehensive and multisectoral approach to development. Expanding the opportunities of women in one area (e.g., education) serves to increase options and promise gains in other areas as well (e.g., health or economic status), and women’s well-being is enhanced while their ability to assume active roles in promoting change is increased.

PROWID projects set in motion a train of events that prompted community, regional, and even national attention to gender-based constraints confronting women and generated actions aimed at breaking down barriers preventing women’s realization of their rights and freedoms. In many cases, *process* itself (in this case, expanding women’s agency) represented both the means and the end. It was important that individuals and communities find ways in which to document gaps, discuss causes, and explore new directions collaboratively in order to determine paths to economic advancement that promoted the well-being of all community members.

## Recommendations and Lessons

The following recommendations emerge:

- Engage women as well as men in defining action plans and projects that reflect their local realities and strategic interests.
- Include relevant training and capacity building when designing programs in order to bolster individual and organizational capabilities needed to promote women’s agency.
- Create meaningful changes in women’s economic status through fundamental shifts in the policy context.
- Use both qualitative and quantitative instruments to assess women’s economic status and the effects of changes in policies and programs.
- Collect sex-disaggregated data to help define gender differences and support gender analysis.
- Observe and uphold the rights and obligations detailed in international human rights treaties as a means to promote the economic advancement of women.

The following lesson was learned:

- Information is a vital resource for communities formulating development strategies and action plans for change.



# A Rights and Freedoms-Based Approach to Development



**T**he last two decades have witnessed a striking evolution in the conception of not only human rights, but of development, as both relate to promoting the freedom, well-being and dignity of all people. The recent and ongoing convergence of these two approaches is invigorating the dialogue regarding the field of women in development, and reshaping policy and practice promoting women's advancement.

Since it first articulated international human rights, the United Nations General Assembly has sought to define the interconnected and interdependent nature of all human rights and to recognize the equality of women and men in their freedom to realize all rights.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the United Nations has addressed specific populations (e.g., the rights of women and children) as well as specific rights (e.g., the rights to development and food) through a series of reports and conventions that clarify the meaning, content, and application of various human rights. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) focused on women's rights in particular as an essential aspect of human rights, and subsequent declarations and conventions paid particular attention to women in order to amplify and reinforce their rights. In a resolution articulating the right to development, the United Nations in 1986 sought to define development within a rights-based framework as: "a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of

benefits resulting therefrom" (United Nations 1986). If we look at the collective body of international human rights and relate them to the aims and means of development, it becomes possible to re-examine traditional approaches to women in development through a new, rights-based lens (Whelan 1998).

Increasingly, development and human rights experts are engaged in dialogue that is shaping a new understanding that people-centered sustainable development arises from the relationship between human development and human rights. In essence, this envisions development as the progressive realization of all human rights, wherein the two realms can be viewed as one. In the words of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), "Human rights and human development share a common vision and a common purpose—to secure the freedom, well-being and dignity of all people everywhere" (UNDP 2000, p. 1). If economic policies and development programs are to eradicate poverty and realize human rights and freedoms, it is imperative that they uphold the principles of participation, empowerment, accountability, and non-discrimination.

"Poverty eradication without empowerment is unsustainable. Social integration without minority rights is unimaginable. Gender equality without women's rights is illusory. Full employment without workers' rights may be no more than a promise of sweat shops, exploitation, and slavery. The logic of human rights in development is inescapable."

Source: Robinson 2000

<sup>1</sup> In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights setting forth general principles of human rights, and in 1966 adopted the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights defining specific rights and their limitations. Collectively, these are known as the International Bill of Human Rights.

Efforts by state and non-state actors to realize the interconnections between development interventions and rights-based strategies place new emphasis on the inclusion and participation of all members of society in shaping development goals. Yet in many regions of the world, women's freedom to develop their full potential is constrained by socioeconomic and political norms and practices. These constraints effectively deprive them of income and impede their ability to surmount obstacles that hinder their socioeconomic advancement.

All individuals as well as the institutions and sectors that represent their interests and absorb their energies must be seen as participants in the development process. With regard to economic concerns and challenging historical patterns of women's exclusion from many gains associated with development, the 1995 Beijing Declaration underscored that "eradication of poverty based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice requires the involvement of women in economic and social development, equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centered sustainable development" (United Nations 1996, p. 8).

As suggested above, development means more than economic growth and the fulfillment of basic needs such as adequate health care, nutrition, sanitation, and education. In his paradigm-shifting analysis, Amartya Sen considers development as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. "Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity or repressive states" (Sen 1999, p. 3). In this context, the capabilities of individuals, which are simultaneously the measure of their individual freedom and human development as well as the means of expanding their opportunities and thereby building new capabilities, depend upon institutional arrangements in economic, social, and political spheres. This implies the interconnections between economic facilities, political

freedoms, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security that influence the process of development, and which require a corresponding plurality of institutions.

Sen places freedom at the center of development, stating that freedoms are both the primary ends *and* principal means of development that are interlinked among themselves:

*Political freedoms (in the form of free speech and elections) help to promote economic security. Social opportunities (in the form of education and health facilities) facilitate economic participation. Economic facilities (in the form of opportunities for participation in trade and production) can help to generate personal abundance as well as public resources for social facilities. Freedoms of different kinds can strengthen one another (Sen 1999, p. 11).*

Sen cautions that societies have values, attitudes, and prevailing norms that states express through policies *and* actions. Policies designed to expand human freedom, especially women's freedoms and capabilities, may get derailed in the quest for maximum economic gain (Sen 1999). Given such a possibility, protective measures as well as the accountability afforded by a rights framework are needed at national and local levels to ensure that women's human rights are not taken for granted, but are honored in word and deed, from the household to the highest levels of government. States and localities must be held accountable for instituting policies and implementing measures that respect, protect, and promote women's human rights and freedoms, such as the right to participate in local development forums or use productive resources for economic activities.

The development literature, whether from Kerala state in India, Bangladesh, or Guinea in West Africa, provides ample evidence that given the education, skills, and freedom to earn an income, women readily exercise options leading to outcomes that benefit both themselves and the wider society. Increased education, for instance, may give a woman access to critical information about regulating the number of

children she bears and the care of those children, which in turn results in lower maternal and infant mortality rates. Education also increases the likelihood of prosperity through employment or entrepreneurial activities, as well as greater opportunity for participating in civil society and democratic institutions. At the same time, a woman's opportunities for utilizing economic resources such as land and capital will improve the more she participates in policymaking arenas, giving voice to issues that affect women's lives. In short, the political freedoms and socioeconomic opportunities a woman enjoys significantly affect her ability to develop and use her capabilities, to the advantage of her family and community.

Using a human rights and freedoms approach to development, this paper synthesizes the findings from a number of PROWID projects that explore

women's economic roles and opportunities and their aspirations for advancement. It reviews the sorts of constraints they face in fulfilling them and considers the relationship between women's rights and capabilities on the one hand and development policy and practice on the other. The findings can be grouped into three broad categories that overlap in their lessons for development:

- Increasing local participation, building women's skills, and changing institutional norms and practices.
- Expanding women's access to and control of productive resources and transforming the institutions that govern them.
- Promoting gender equity in sustainable community management of natural resources.



# Increasing Local Participation, Building Women's Skills, and Changing Institutional Norms and Practices



One component of the process of supporting and expanding women's development freedoms involves two sorts of change; one initiated at the community level and the other directed toward institutional change at district, regional, and national levels. The first requires a community at the grassroots level (perhaps working in dialogue with a development organization) to identify an obstacle or deprivation impeding women's development, assess the needs and strengths of the community, and then facilitate the community's search for a realistic, sustainable solution. The second involves changing the conceptual framework and operating practices of institutions that shape the development path taken. The two levels of change are not mutually exclusive, as suggested by the findings of the four PROWID projects reviewed in this section from India, Malawi, Mexico, and throughout Latin America.

## The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA): Building Capacity for Poor Women in Banaskantha, India

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a member-based organization that for nearly 30 years has involved resource-poor women across India in grassroots initiatives to build individual capacities, create self-reliant organizations, and forge links between poor women, government departments, and markets. SEWA initiates programs and facilitates the building of a local organization, which then assumes responsibility for program implementation, expansion, and future planning. Because the sustainability and self-reliance of any program or organization depends on its managers, SEWA works to build the capacity of a cadre of local

managers. As a result, women are empowered and social capital is formed (SEWA 1999).

In its PROWID project, SEWA worked with a district-level association known as BDMSA to support diverse income-generating activity groups in the Banaskantha District in the desert area of northern Gujarat, India.<sup>2</sup> Such groups had been organized around various areas of women's self-employment, for instance focused on dairy and fodder, artisan handicrafts, forest product collection, or salt farming. By 1996, the BDMSA was expanding rapidly to include additional teams, and the SEWA staff's capacity to serve them was stretched beyond limits. SEWA wanted to decentralize by reducing its role and leaving management of the BDMSA to



*Gujarati women working collectively in their activity group*

<sup>2</sup> BDMSA stands for the Banaskantha DWCRA Mahila SEWA Association, reflecting links between its activities and the government's Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) program. In BDMSA, a "spearhead" team includes some members of an activity group and a smaller number of staff organizers trained by SEWA in social mobilization, planning and financial management, who then work together to organize all teams working on the same activity. Spearhead teams receive advice from a district-wide Executive Committee, and team leaders report to local coordinating teams that communicate with government officials and report to a District Coordinator.

the local administrative team. An external assessment was made of the organization's management capacity and it was determined that BDMSA needed an intensive capacity-building program to strengthen its abilities in four areas: (1) conceptual thinking and problem solving; (2) assessment and evaluation; (3) leadership; and (4) management skills.

In implementing change, SEWA followed a needs-based approach reflecting the challenges and circumstances women face in their daily lives. To achieve this focus, SEWA used an internal learning system (ILS) model<sup>3</sup> based on pictorial diaries kept by the women members, many of whom were illiterate, to record changes over time in the productive assets of themselves and their households. The iterative process that this entailed highlighted the needs and economic constraints faced by the self-employed women and enabled SEWA to better target the services designed to assist them.

When SEWA staff and facilitators introduced the diary methodology to rural members in Banaskantha on a pilot basis, they realized that the diary needed to be modified to fit the particular culture and environment, as well as the activities, of these particular women. This process was time-consuming, but it enhanced the SEWA staff's ability to serve the needs of these women.<sup>4</sup> SEWA staff members participat-

ing in the project also kept diaries, making it a cooperative, collaborative process.

SEWA members and staff filled out the diaries in group meetings. The process of keeping such a diary helped self-employed women to analyze their assets and to see who owned them, and helped them frame the obstacles and constraints they faced in producing and managing income from a variety of activities. Similarly, SEWA staff facilitators were able to track their own resources and income and to see the change over time.

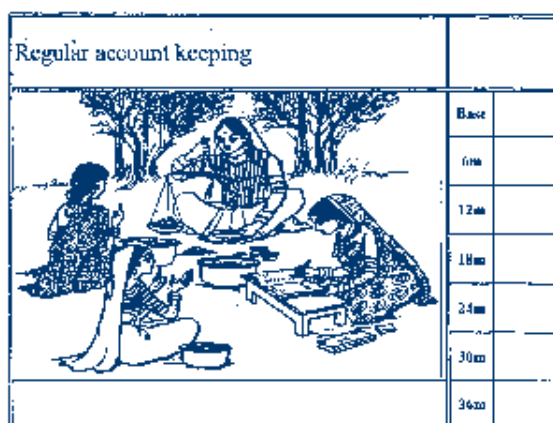
*There was one income page with a picture of a cow. I explained to the members that even if they don't sell the milk from the cow it still counts as income since otherwise they would have to go to the market and buy the milk. It took a long time for them to see what I meant.*

—Chandrikaben, crafts organizer

By working from the grassroots up, SEWA's project expanded impoverished rural women's opportunities to manage their resources effectively and to increase their financial capacity. In its effort to serve the needs and interests of these women, SEWA built an organization through which women can access critical resources, such as credit and land, needed to promote the growth of their businesses. It also increased the capabilities of BDMSA staff members to work effectively in organizing, managing, and conceptualizing changes that will increase BDMSA's overall capacity and efficiency. In the process, women's freedoms—both economic and political—at several levels have been enhanced and expanded.

### **Via Campesina Women's Working Group: Regional Advocacy of Latin American Peasant Women's Rights**

Whereas SEWA works with women at the grassroots level in one country, Via Campesina is a global movement of organizations of peasants, operators of small and medium-sized farms,



Example of SEWA diary page

<sup>3</sup>Developed by Dr. Helzi Noponen, a researcher at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the internal learning system had been successfully field tested with three nongovernmental organizations in India before being introduced to the BDMSA. The system is designed to be shaped according to the needs, capacities, and unique experiences of each user; to go beyond inputs and outputs to record changes in living conditions and socioeconomic impact; and to collect longitudinal data sets on entire program populations.

<sup>4</sup>Participatory practice appears to be a long, drawn out, often contentious process, but its advantage lies in its appropriateness to the given situation, in its ability to utilize local knowledge and expertise to shape an intervention, and in making the likelihood of sustainability of outcomes over time more plausible.



*Via Campesina women at the regional workshop convened with the Latin American Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CLOC)*

and not as an essential part of farm and household economies. Consequently, farm and rural organizations have tended to exclude women from participating in policymaking, even when it pertains directly to their ability to perform this important economic task.

The Via Campesina Women's Working Group was formed in 1996 to remove the social, cultural, and economic barriers to women's equal participation and representation at all levels of the larger organization. One of Via Campesina's key goals is fair and equitable treatment

farm workers, rural women, and indigenous agrarian communities. Despite the critical roles rural women play as mothers, farmers, and farm laborers, trends in economic globalization do not take into account their needs or those of their families and communities. For example, women's food production has traditionally been viewed as an extension of their household tasks

for all food producers and genuine food security for all rural communities. Via Campesina also seeks effective strategies to improve rural women's position and condition relative to men, including action plans, collaborative efforts, and leadership skills development (Via Campesina 1999). To that end, the group initiated the PROWID project, "Peasant Women on the

### **Assessing Beneficiary Participation in the World Bank's Education and Health Projects in Oaxaca, Mexico**

Oaxaca, one of Mexico's poorest states, has a large indigenous population (largely Mayan and Mixtec) that accounts for 39 percent of the total population. The Mexican NGO Trasporencia studied three Bank-funded projects in the state, two in education and the other in basic healthcare. In collaboration with two Oaxacan NGOs, it evaluated the extent to which the Bank solicited and promoted beneficiary participation, especially women's participation, in each project. The assessment found that the Bank conceptualized both "community participation" and "gender impact" in very limited ways, despite public forums in Oaxaca that offered alternative models. With regard to participation, for example, the *asamblea comunitaria*, or assembly of all resident heads of households in a community, provides a forum and model for discussing community issues and deciding on a course of action that was not tapped as a resource by the Bank.

To alter the way the Bank understood "participation" and "gender impact" in its Oaxaca projects, Trasporencia held a seminar and a series of dialogues that included Oaxaca-based NGOs, academics, grassroots organizations working in the fields of education and health, government officials, and Bank representatives to analyze how the Bank might better promote women's participation in various phases of its three projects. Trasporencia's efforts resulted in an increase in the Bank's collaboration with local NGOs, and built new linkages between the Bank and women's organizations.

As Trasporencia conducted its analysis, it developed a highly participatory process that made use of the research findings. Thus, components of the PROWID project were modified on an on-going basis, allowing them to incorporate indigenous forms of participation and women's needs. The initiative provided a conduit between development organizations and donors operating at an institutional level, and indigenous beneficiaries (including women) operating on the ground.

Source: Bhattacharjea 1998.



Frontiers of Food Security,” to increase women members’ participation and representation in the organization. The project had several objectives:

- To increase women’s awareness of and participation in policy analysis and development processes related to food security.
- To increase the capacity of women farmers to organize at the international level to promote their practical needs and strategic interests.
- To document and share information about successful strategies that women have used to build leadership and participate in advocacy.

To fulfill these objectives, the Women’s Working Group of Via Campesina, in collaboration with women from three regionally-based organizations, conducted three regional participatory workshops that occurred in South America, in Central America, and in the Caribbean. Using participatory strategies that drew on women’s daily realities and current situations, all three workshops identified similar key issues regarding agrarian reform, food sovereignty, human rights (including labor rights, education, and health), and identity and self-determination.

The regional workshops yielded several benefits. They strengthened the linkages between women in agrarian communities across national boundaries. They also helped to build solidarity between women farmers of varying circumstances. By sharing information and experiences, the women increased their understanding of the international economic and political forces that affect the daily lives of rural women in all three regions. The women also came away with a better grasp of the gender barriers they face in participating equally with men in associations and other institutional settings.

As a result of the project, both the women and men involved in Via Campesina have become more committed to ensuring the active and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the organization’s work. A position paper on gender equality reflects discussions with and recommendations by participants. This paper

### Designing an Integrated Technology, Information, Education, and Communication Process among Rural Women in Malawi

In Malawi, several ministries (e.g., Agriculture and Irrigation and Health and Population), Irish NGO Self-Help Development International, and the District Commissioner came together to plan a strategy for changing the way the government delivered interventions. Pilot interventions were developed using a community diagnostic, problem-solving process called “Integrated Technology, Information, Education, and Communication (ITIEC).”

The Project Team designed Training-of-Trainers sessions (TOTs) whereby trainees could immediately utilize new skills in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). A set of basic PRA and gender analysis tools was used to help villagers identify and prioritize community problems, formulate and review Community Action Plans, and establish commitments to lead the various interventions.

Priority problems identified were largely related to issues of food security, population pressures, and HIV/AIDS. For instance, women expressed concern over not being able to tend their food crops as they once had because they were too busy caring for family or community members with HIV/AIDS. The Community Action Plans were produced, evaluated, and revised by members of the community and enabled the implementation of various endeavors that had been established successfully elsewhere. These included a plan to compost manure in order to supplement inorganic fertilizer; chlorine-treated drinking water provided by the Ministry of Health and Population; farmers clubs and training programs on accessing seed loans; and community drama groups to write and perform plays on HIV/AIDS.

One of the lessons learned was that in order to make a project fully participatory, all partners and stakeholders must be fully involved from the point that a project is first conceptualized through its strategic planning phase, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. A critical outcome of the project, too, was its success in building partnerships both among technical sectors and between communities and different levels of governmental and nongovernmental organizations. Through the TOTs and PRAs, the multisectoral teams significantly increased their



*Well-building as part of Liputhu Community Action Plan*

understanding of the connections between their disciplines, as well as of the value of an integrated approach to development.

Source: Self-Help Development International et al. 1999

formed the basis for deliberations at the Via Campesina International Women's Assembly in December 1999. Additionally, as a direct result of the Via Campesina workshops, women constituted an unprecedented 48 percent of delegates to the Congress of the Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas ("Latin American Coordination of Peasant Organizations," or CLOC) and were able to ensure adoption of their resolutions and proposals. The CLOC proposals reflect priority issues for the Women's Working Group, including equal access to health and education services for rural and indigenous women; equal participation by women in decisionmaking within Latin American campesino organizations; sustainable, ecologically sound land reform policies; and use of technology in agriculture.

Cooperation between the Via Campesina Women's Working Group and regional organizations established common ground on key issues and provided a regional mechanism for linking women farmers, giving them a venue to share problems and ideas, and a way to build solidarity. Their work demonstrates that expansion of women's rights and freedoms is inextricably linked to changes in the global market and in

national policies. By including women and making them more visible and effective in Via Campesina's policy decisions and organization, the Women's Working Group hopes to build a network of women farmers who are conversant about their gender needs, and who know how to advocate for women's issues at all levels.

In summary, each of the aforementioned projects relied on capacity building and community mobilization to end a pervasive sense of isolation, marginalization, and relative powerlessness among participants, who reported that their leadership training and exchange experiences enabled them to share in decisionmaking and to better advocate on their own behalf. These women gained an increased understanding of the root causes and validity of the issues they confront. Many also developed greater self-confidence and improved their ability to exercise leadership in the economic life of their communities and organizations. Most importantly, women who assumed they had nothing to say learned that they do indeed have a legitimate and powerful voice, relevant experience, and valuable expertise, and that they are able to share these with others.





# Expanding Women's Access to and Control of Productive Resources and Transforming the Institutions That Govern Them



**A** second component related to women's human freedoms and economic advancement addresses the constraints affecting access to and control over productive assets. Many women find that their right to participate freely in economic interchange has been shaped, and often circumscribed, by societal values and norms that deny them access to and control over crucial productive resources for development. To ameliorate the existing inequality, we must institute what Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996) refer to as "gender redistributive policies" that are intended to transform existing patterns of resource allocation in a more egalitarian direction. These must relate to the full range of productive assets—land, labor, and financial capital—required by active participation in economic processes. The PROWID projects in India, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, and Sri Lanka summarized in this section demonstrate both the need and means to ensure women's access to such assets.

## Land and Labor

### **The Centre for Rural Legal Studies: Leveling the Terrain for Rural Women in the Western Cape, South Africa**

The Centre for Rural Legal Studies ("the Centre") in South Africa was launched in 1991 to conduct research, training, and advocacy to promote and protect women farmworkers' rights throughout South Africa. In its PROWID project initiated in 1996, the Centre devised a three-pronged approach to advocate for rural women's land rights in the context of the country's post-apartheid land reform programs and with reference to relevant rights of women elaborated in the articles of CEDAW (The Centre 1999).

First, in the project's early stages, researchers conducted a preliminary study of the land and

gender situation in two government-designated land reform beneficiary communities. The Centre found that use of the term "household" as the target beneficiary unit for access to land redistribution subsidies being offered would reinforce gender inequities. Both men and women indicated that they designated the man name as "head of household." This designation denies women as individuals, and in particular, single women, access to land subsidies in their own right, ensures that land continues to be registered in the man's name, and negates women's tenure rights in those households.

Second, to advocate change among other stakeholders, the Centre held a seminar to inform and educate government administrators, NGOs, and community-based organizations (CBOs) about the liabilities incurred in using "household" as the target unit for land reform as well as other development interventions. Not only was it critical to educate these institutional players, but also to inform rural women of their rights to individual tenure prior to implementation of the land reform.

The third part of the Centre's campaign for women's land rights related to monitoring and



*Women farmworkers in the Western Cape*

evaluation. To protect women's rights, the Centre wanted to ensure that land reform be carried out in keeping with the principles of CEDAW. It was less successful in getting a commitment from the Department of Land Affairs to establish concrete indicators for use in monitoring implementation of gender-related land reform. The Department did agree, however, to explore mechanisms for evaluation and enforcement with other role-players in civil society.

#### CEDAW Article 14

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:
  - (a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;
  - (b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;
  - (c) To benefit directly from social security programmes;
  - (d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;
  - (e) To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment;
  - (f) To participate in all community activities;
  - (g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;
  - (h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

Source: United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted as General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979

In follow-up work, the Centre refocused its advocacy from the national level to the specific situation of women farmworkers in the Western Cape in the southern tip of South Africa. The Centre began with the question, "What is sustainable and equitable development for women living in rural areas in the Western Cape?" (Sunde and Kleinbooi 1999) This crucial question highlights the need to recognize that the women in this area face specific circumstances related to their class and location. Rural colored communities in the Western Cape are among the most disadvantaged and impoverished groups in democratic South Africa (James et al. 1996).

What rural women in this province wanted more than anything was to secure land for a residence rather than for production. Women in rural areas of the Western Cape depend on income derived from *commercial* agriculture, either directly as laborers or indirectly through a partner or family member working on land owned by others. Their specific needs must be considered and accommodated in any regional land reform policy that will redistribute land more equitably. By addressing the land and housing rights of colored women farmworkers, the project sets a precedent for ensuring that other entitlements related to women's freedom and development are secured.

One of the constraints facing these Western Cape women farmworkers was lack of knowledge about their conditions of employment and about gender relations on commercial farms. As a rule, females earn less than male farmworkers, have fewer training opportunities, and are vulnerable to harassment. Consequently, the project set out to educate, inform and influence a variety of stakeholders to promote equitable and sustainable development of women farmworkers in accordance with CEDAW especially Article 14 that addresses the rights of rural women in the context of development.

To lay the groundwork, the Centre carried out a survey of 112 farm employers and 345 women farmers in the Western Cape, followed by focus group interviews to get a qualitative sense of the women's lives, hopes, and ambitions. In addi-

tion, interviews were held with key trade union leaders, CBOs, and NGOs working in the Western Cape to assess their attitudes and awareness of CEDAW. From the research results, the Centre learned that few respondents knew anything about CEDAW, and that the provincial government, though aware that South Africa had ratified the UN convention, did not embrace a serious commitment to CEDAW principles.

Despite the obstacles, the Centre painstakingly and successfully lobbied the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE), established under the Government of National Unity, to collaborate. The goal was to achieve equitable development for women farmworkers by having the CGE embrace the CEDAW framework as a tool for meeting the needs of agricultural workers by committing a portion of the Commission's resources to promoting civil society awareness and monitoring compliance with CEDAW in the agricultural sector throughout the country (Sunde and Kleinbooi 1999). The Centre assisted the CGE in the design and use of indicators for monitoring Western Cape compliance with CEDAW and hosted workshops for CGE staff to improve their program implementation and monitoring skills. Representatives of key trade unions and legal advice offices, as well as NGOs, also attended workshops on women farmworkers' rights and learned about CEDAW as a tool for achieving gender equality.

Subsequently, the Centre held a workshop for women farmworkers to give them feedback on the research, to inform them of CEDAW, and to educate them about how they might use the Convention as a tool to secure and protect their rights. Further, by making provincial government departments (including the Office on the Status of Women) as well as civil society aware of CEDAW and the particular situation of women farmworkers in the Western Cape, the Centre anticipated that appropriate government institutions would take responsibility for gender-equitable policies and program implementation, and that civil society organizations would, in turn, hold those government institutions accountable to their obligations.

In sum, the project laid the groundwork for a policy that transformed the relationship between gender and land reform, and enhanced the implementation of this policy. The Centre's ability to engage other NGOs in the reform process was crucial to the campaign's momentum. Without a collaborative effort to change the way the land reform policy was being written, it is unlikely that women would have been given an equal share. The project enhanced the efficacy of women farmworkers by increasing their access not only to information and knowledge but to land for development, thus expanding their economic freedoms.

### **The Centre for Women's Research: Changing the Vocational Training Landscape in Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, despite the high percentage of females enrolled in secondary and tertiary education, women have not been able to turn their educational gains to their economic advantage as readily as men. Nearly 80 percent of school-age girls enroll in secondary school and there are roughly two female students for every three male students at the tertiary level. Yet in 1998, only 41.9 percent of women were economically active in the production of goods and services, little more than half of the economic activity rate of men. While women represent more than half of unpaid family workers engaged in unremunerated subsistence and non-market activities, they comprise only 27.2 percent of the nation's professional and technical workers and 17.3 percent of its administrators and managers (UNDP 2000).

Gender stereotyping in areas of education, vocational training, and employment has long been an obstacle to girls' and women's advancement in Sri Lanka. However, wide participation by girls and women in general education has created a related demand among them for access to vocational training and employment. To level the field and promote women's participation in all sectors of the Sri Lankan economy, the Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR) initiated a PROWID project designed to alter social norms regarding women's employment and facilitate girls' and women's acquisition of the broad range of vocational skills required by

new employment opportunities characteristic of the economy over the last decade.

CENWOR's research on vocational training and patterns of women's employment revealed that girls and women currently constitute about half of all students in vocational training programs. Despite the diversity of employment opportunities found in Sri Lanka's rapidly changing economy, most female trainees were concentrated in courses (e.g., dressmaking, food preparation, cosmetology, secretarial services) that reflect societal presumptions about women as nurturers and service providers. Women and girls were underrepresented in technical courses (e.g., engineering, surveying, construction, welding) perceived as areas of "male excellence" (CENWOR 1998).

CENWOR identified three obstacles impeding the development of policies and programs that would ultimately reduce gender-based inequities in employment. These obstacles include: socialization that leads to gender stereotyping; lack of vocational training information available to women and girls; and narrow training choices for women and girls within the vocational training framework.

Two goals shaped CENWOR's PROWID project: to change attitudes among students, parents, trainers, and employers about appropriate training; and to promote policies and programs that foster nontraditional employment opportu-

nities for women and girls. The project's advocacy strategies included:

- creating and disseminating advocacy materials that provide vocational training information aimed at students, girls who stopped attending school, unemployed young women, parents, policymakers, school administrators and counselors, and training agencies;
- designing and conducting gender sensitization workshops at schools for trainers, school counselors, and school administrators;
- production and dissemination of an advocacy brochure for employers that highlights the advantages of employing women.

The campaign relied on a multi-pronged approach. First, the project reached out directly to students through a series of publications including a cartoon pamphlet, posters, and a comprehensive directory describing areas of vocational expertise and relevant courses available at institutions across the country. Second, it built an institutional constituency composed of relevant stakeholders that eventually bought into the idea of expanding girls' training options and worked to revise existing programs. Key members of this constituency included representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Department of Labor, the Federation of Chambers of Industry and Commerce, and various vocational training institutions. Third, CENWOR reached out to relevant NGOs (local and international) for support and collaboration, including the distribution of materials and the coordination of gender sensitization workshops. Taken together, these project components helped ensure that changes in attitudes and in practice would be far-reaching and enduring.

CENWOR assessed the results of its campaign by measuring institutional responses and actions at various levels. At the national level, the National Youth Services Council invited CENWOR to provide a gender assessment of its new policy document in an effort to move toward gender equity in its programs. Additionally, the Ministry of Vocational Training requested CENWOR's



Cartoon "Shanthi's World," produced for girls finishing secondary school and making employment decisions



input regarding critical gender issues in vocational training for a proposal to the Asian Development Bank for support of a national vocational training program. A related outcome was the appointment of a woman to the Board of the National Apprenticeship and Industrial Training Authority. Clearly the project's findings can help inform the implementation of the vocational training component of the National Plan of Action for Women.

At the local level, CENWOR's initial workshops created a demand for more workshops, some of which were then supported by Swisscontact, an NGO with a particular interest in employment training and skills building. The workshops created a multiplier effect as collaborating NGOs then began to conduct their own workshops and to expand the reach of CENWOR's initial campaign. As a result, more girls than ever before are exposed to the idea of nontraditional vocational training opportunities, and more counselors and instructors are aware of the value of training girls and women for unconventional employment. Time will tell if resulting changes in enrollment patterns and altered attitudes and behaviors will lead to new economic gains for women, and if women's increased capacity to act as agents of change will foster improvement in their economic well-being.

## Financial Resources

Access to and control over property and financial resources are crucial components of women's economic development and freedom. In impoverished families and communities, such resources are by definition scarce, and among women who are the sole income providers, they are scarcer still. Women who lack property are unable to gain access to loans needed to launch or expand a business when lending institutions require collateral, usually in the form of property.

In response to such constraints, women have adopted a variety of strategies in their quest for needed resources. In place of collateral, in some Latin American locales a woman seeking a loan is able to secure a *patron*, a stand-in sponsor who vouches for the woman's reliability and is willing to place his or her property on the line

on her behalf. In other places, notably sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and parts of East Asia, women form revolving credit associations. No collateral is required but each member contributes a small amount on a regular basis and the total amount of the group's savings (usually less than \$500)

is loaned on a rotating basis to each woman desiring credit. If a member is unable to make a payment, the other members are required to cover her default. In still other situations, savings institutions are willing to extend credit to women on a group basis so that a women's group shares the responsibility for paying back the loan. Examples of this model include the "Trust Bank" promoted by the Women's Opportunity Fund (see box) and the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh that extends credit to individual women without collateral through rural credit institutions.

Of the PROWID projects that catered to women's needs for expanded financial resources, usually to start a business, the one most directly involved with impoverished women's needs was Grupo de Educación Popular con Mujeres (GEM) in Mexico, through its network of affiliated regional centers. Many of the women it serves are indigenous women who historically have been marginalized in Mexican society. GEM's work, described below, illustrates how equity in financial resources can increase women's enterprises and provide a foundation for their economic freedom.



*Woman trained as an engineer on a work site in Sri Lanka*

### Developing a Model for Women Entrepreneurs in Transitional Economies

A PROWID-funded project was designed to refine and expand the “Trust Bank” model launched in Russia by the Women’s Opportunity Fund (WOF), a US-based division of Opportunity International. The Trust Bank program, which aims to enhance women’s entrepreneurial roles and economic status both within the home and in the community, is based on mutual responsibilities among members of a self-selecting group, rather than collateral.<sup>5</sup>

The Trust Bank program aims to enhance women’s entrepreneurial roles and economic status both within the home and in the community. This innovative lending and savings model is committed to serving the smallest and neediest entrepreneurs. The model is based on mutual responsibilities among members of a self-selecting group, rather than collateral.<sup>5</sup>

During the 18-month project, the Doveriye Cooperative model was expanded to cover two new sites. The Trust Banks issued 2,000 loans, of which women entrepreneurs received 80 percent. Combined with training, consultations, and savings, this assistance contributed to women’s financial well-being, independence, and control over their economic activities. Trust Bank loan officers, WOF, and Opportunity International staff from Russia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Romania also convened a workshop to formalize best practices in microcredit and lending for Eastern Europe. The resulting document, *Trust Bank Standards*, will also provide a sound framework for future efforts to expand the model throughout the region.



WOF Trust Bank client in her market stall

Through this process, WOF learned that microlending agencies, their partners, and project beneficiaries should collaborate on the design and implementation of management and information systems from a program’s outset. Accurate and useful data, along with documentation and sharing of experiences, are necessary to constantly improve the quality of systems and portfolio management, as well as to ensure sustainability of a project. Further, solidarity lending groups, short-term loans at market interest rates for working capital, and weekly loan repayment meetings, attract women to the programs and sustain their active involvement. However, successful programs that enhance women’s status must extend beyond simply providing loans and fixing repayment schedules. They must focus on the client, providing business development services that are demand driven and include consultation with all levels of stakeholders on project design and implementation.

Source: Women’s Opportunity Fund 1999.

<sup>5</sup>Very small (average of \$350), short-term (1-6 month) loans are extended in the form of a continuous, gradually increasing line of credit to Trust Bank members, who are required to save. If one member is unwilling or unable to make a payment, the other members are required to “cover” for her.

### Grupo de Educación Popular con Mujeres (GEM): Achieving Equity in Financial Resources and Enterprise Development

GEM is a Mexican NGO founded in 1986 to assist women’s groups in transforming unequal, discriminatory relationships between women and men while improving women’s living and working conditions. GEM’s goal is to promote opportunities for women’s social enterprise through its regional centers, and to link the centers in a network that is at once mutually supportive and instructive in terms of socioeconomic interventions that benefit women in impoverished Mexican communities (GEM 1999).

Mexican women earn roughly a quarter of what males earn per capita (\$4,594 to \$12,216) (UNDP 1999). The national adult literacy rate is 87.9 percent for women and 92.3 percent for men, although significant regional differences exist. Despite technical development and modernization in Mexico’s urban areas, 40 million people continue to live in poverty, of which 17 million live in extreme poverty. Two states in which GEM is active, Chiapas and Oaxaca, have the highest poverty rates in Mexico. They also are among the four states with the largest indigenous populations and the lowest adult literacy rates (GEM 1999). One challenge GEM faces in these two southern states is meeting the needs of largely Mayan and Mixtec rural women who are only partially literate or have no literacy skills.<sup>6</sup>

The overall goal of GEM’s PROWID project was to continue strengthening the Social Enterprise (*Empresas Sociales*) Program that targets women in the six participating regional NGO centers. The concept of “social enterprise” is central to GEM’s approach to women’s development and refers to an integrated approach that weaves various economic and social aspects into a single project or training program. For example, the practical needs for skills training and income generation are integrated with ecological awareness and strategic social consciousness-

<sup>6</sup>The two northern states where GEM has affiliated centers, Chihuahua and Coahuila, border Texas and are the least affected by poverty. Partially this may be the result of growing economic opportunities along the border resulting from increased trade with the United States and *maquiladora* (export-driven assembly plant) production. The problems of women microentrepreneurs in these two states differ considerably from women, especially indigenous women, in the southern states.

raising, and at the same time address women's personal needs for better health care and violence prevention (GEM 1999). In keeping with this approach, GEM aimed through action-oriented research, training, and organizational capacity-building activities to engage participants and staff in systematically analyzing and documenting their work and life experiences. With that knowledge, participants and staff worked to strengthen organizational capacity, strategic planning, and advocacy, and to facilitate job creation.

One of GEM's priorities was to develop a participatory process for community women based on an approach known as "*enseñanza-aprendizaje*" ("teaching-learning") that includes continuous reflection and feedback. The demand for this approach arose jointly from the regional centers. GEM staff assisted the women in implementing the process and applying for apprenticeships, allowing opportunities for women to share and discuss their work and life experiences, and to receive feedback on ways to improve their situations.

The projects initiated by GEM's affiliated centers reflect the interests and aspirations of rural women (and their families) served in those states and range from revolving savings and loan funds and traditional medicine production to a community library and a well-digging project. As one direct and measurable benefit, these projects created 120 new jobs in a variety of nontraditional areas for women such as hotel management, construction (wells for water in Chihuahua, houses in Chiapas, latrines in Puebla), toy and furniture production, and sheep farming. Broader benefits of these projects also accrue to the communities at large. For instance, families in Puebla benefited from the local women's ecotourism hotel project as it brought new management skills, job opportunities, and entry into a lucrative trade, while a new childcare center in Coahuila provided working families with safe, reliable childcare services.

Policy change provides a further example of the cascade effect arising from the activities initiated by the regional centers. Women from the centers became adroit in identifying gender

issues and drafting proposed policies submitted to local and state officials on a range of economic and social issues that affect Mexican women. In Chihuahua, a group lobbied for and achieved an *estancia* (office) for women's issues at the state level. They are working with the Chihuahua state legislature to develop a two-year plan to address issues such as the rights of women, family violence, childcare, and health conditions in the workplace.

### Training in Strategic Business Planning for Indian Microfinance Organizations

In India, the national demand for credit is enormous—perhaps five times greater than available funds. Thus, there is considerable pressure on institutions that issue microloans to the disadvantaged, in particular women, to expand rapidly. Managing a loan fund, however, requires business and financial planning skills, such as strategic planning, financial supervision, and savings and credit management. Many NGOs involved in microfinance, however, lack expertise in this area. A PROWID project to train staff members of Indian microfinance institutions in sound business and financial management practices was undertaken by Friends of Women's World Banking/India (FWWB/I), an affiliate of the international women's financial organization known as Women's World Banking.

FWWB/I developed a Strategic Business Planning curriculum and trained representatives who manage microcredit programs for 59 microfinance NGOs representing 70 percent of FWWB/India's affiliates. This training was the participants' first exposure to strategic and financial planning tools. Many participants had no basic business plan before they attended the training; 93 percent (55) completed strategic business plans afterwards. The five-day training program covered broad business, strategic, and financial planning skills essential to sound microfinance operations. Participants developed organizational vision and mission statements, analyzed their organization's strengths, worked on financial projections, and developed six-month action plans. FWWB/I also provided technical support to participants as they implemented their strategic business plans over the following year.

One outcome of the project was a training manual, "A Resource Training Kit to Build Technical Capacity in Indian Micro Finance Intermediaries" that details FWWB/I's capacity-enhancing process. Another benefit was membership and savings levels increased significantly among the organizations that participated in the training program. Depending on the organization's size—and the degree to which it emphasized microfinance activities—NGOs expanded their membership base by 40 to 90 percent, thereby allowing FWWB/India to achieve its goal of reaching greater numbers of women through its microfinance affiliates.

Source: FWWB/I 1999.



Mexican women in their new shop after GEM microenterprise training

Research and publication initiatives enabled GEM to share its work with NGOs and citizen groups—both throughout Mexico and in other countries—that seek alternative ways to combat poverty and inequality. For example, the publication *Construyendo un Nuevo Poder: Centros Regionales de Capacitación a la Mujer* (“Constructing a New Power: Regional Women’s Training Centers”) provides a case study that describes the background, process, activities, and impact of, as well as lessons learned from, the entire project, thus serving as a model for possible replication in similar settings. In addition, seven issues of the quarterly newsletter *Mujeres Empresarias* (“Women Entrepreneurs”) were published, and 3,600 copies were distributed to community members, local and regional NGOs, and other civic and governmental institutions as well as women participating in programs at regional centers.

GEM also held more than 100 training sessions and regional and national workshops for women who staff GEM and the affiliated regional centers, building capacity by training 18 administrative directors and their staffs in new management and organizational skills. To encourage information exchange and joint policy advocacy and to illustrate how collaboration can be increased, GEM mapped the network of relations that the regional centers share with each other and with other organizations. Collaboration with a diverse group of stakeholders advocating

women’s enterprise development at multiple governmental levels enables GEM and its affiliated centers to strengthen their lobbying position to further extend women’s economic rights in Mexico.<sup>7</sup> GEM is thus contributing to policy reforms that protect and promote women’s rights to productive enterprise, and to new social norms that view women as working members and full participants in civil society.

In summary, the Centre for Rural Legal Studies and CENWOR were both successful in strategically lobbying key institutions and advocating for substantive changes to protect and promote women’s economic rights, thus expanding their future options. Within the limited project timeframe, both NGOs focused their efforts on a single critical issue, improving their chances of achieving change yet never losing sight of the context in which the issue related to the broad spectrum of rights associated with women’s economic advancement. They built on their research findings to devise advocacy strategies that worked. Finally, in each case the organization that implemented the project was a local NGO that was recognized and respected within its country for a solid record of research and advocacy.

In the case of GEM, the project began from a base of knowledge about rural women, expanded that knowledge to include a grounding in theory that could be used to inform its work, and improved its effectiveness through systematic analysis, which resulted in a stronger, more effective network of affiliated centers committed to rural women’s social enterprise. The project confirmed that given equal access to training and financial resources, rural women will opt to initiate small businesses, many of them nontraditional enterprises. Not only do they generate income, but these businesses also give women a new sense of self worth and efficacy.

Both FWWB/I and WOF’s training helped participants learn important finance and business skills essential to improving quality micro-lending services for women. A continued investment in training and support is necessary to expand microfinance activities and the training successes, particularly in regions that are currently underserved.

<sup>7</sup> These stakeholders include six civic organizations in Chiapas that cooperate on 50 productive projects in the state and offer various workshops to build the capacity of promoters of social organization and income generation projects. At the federal district level, GEM collaborated with a national network of organizations on strategic planning. At the national level, GEM continues to work with the government bank to incorporate a gender perspective in its program of assistance to microenterprises.



# Promoting Gender Equity in Sustainable Community Management of Natural Resources



A third component of the process to expand women's development freedoms demonstrated by PROWID projects (and related to the two already discussed) concerns strategies for sustainable development that rely on sound and equitable community management of natural resources. The pressures of development on the environment and related threats to fragile ecosystems and global biodiversity have gained international recognition over the last decade, as demonstrated by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro and the subsequent establishment of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. A review of the Rio commitments during the 1997 U.N. General Assembly Special Session revealed limited progress since 1992 and provided a stark reminder of the continuing challenges.

PROWID projects in Brazil, which included a trio of communities affected by deforestation in Amazonia, and resource management projects in El Salvador, Honduras, and the Philippines illustrate the importance of involving all members of communities—including women—in finding environmentally sound, sustainable solutions to the challenges of economic development. They are the focus of this section.

## **The Rainforest Alliance Projects: Women Organizing for Forests and Community Development in Pará, Brazil**

Brazil is a country with great disparities in wealth and poverty. While the Southeast region (including Brazil's two largest cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) had a poverty rate of roughly 14 percent in 1997, the Northeast, including the Amazonian state of Pará, had a poverty rate of 46 percent (UNDP 1997). Poverty poses a major

challenge in the context of women's development in Pará, particularly because much of the rainforest—the world's largest and a vital source of oxygen and biodiversity for the entire planet—that once was controlled by local communities has been sold to timber companies, leaving those communities with a drastically limited resource base. In response to the economic challenges posed by this alteration of local resources, some women in Amazonian villages, many of whom are illiterate and have been excluded from public decisionmaking, are learning how to weigh the costs and benefits of selling off community forests, and are speaking out on the importance of conserving the forest's resources for long-term use.

Initiated in 1997, the PROWID project was designed to support community women's groups in Pará in their efforts to reverse the trend in deforestation. The project was conducted in collaboration with the Rainforest Alliance, an international NGO based in New York City that is dedicated to the conservation of tropical forests through the development and promotion of economically viable and socially desirable alternatives to forest destruction.

In each of the three communities involved in the project, a grassroots women's organization was already engaged in research, advocacy, skills training, or economic development. These included the *Clube de Maes* (Mothers Club) in Capim, the *Associação das Mulheres que Lutam para Sobreviver de Oeiras do Pará* (the Association of Women Struggling to Survive) in Oeiras, and the *Associação da Mulheres Timboteuense Margarida Barbosa* (Association of Women of Novo Timboteua). While each organization conducted an intervention tailored to their

particular abilities and the priority issues of their communities, all three were united by a set of common objectives:

- Help women gain knowledge about their role in natural resource use and conservation;
- Strengthen women's economic capacity through the creation of micro-industries;
- Train women in the use and management of non-timber forest products;

### Gender Fairness in Coastal Resource Management in the Philippines

Community-based coastal resource management (CBCRM) is an increasingly popular strategy to address pressures on coastal resources and the economic vitality of fishing communities. A central component of the strategy is "gender fairness," which requires the active involvement of women in projects to promote sustainable resource consumption and economic development. Through PROWID, the Tambuyog Development Center on the western Philippine island of Palawan launched a CBCRM pilot project in 1997. Tambuyog's project fulfilled dual purposes: to prepare women to organize, articulate, and advocate their interests in the context of coastal resource management in their communities; and to critically examine and expand its own institutional capacity with regard to gender considerations.

Project staff collaborated with local program officers and women in the fishing communities to carry out participatory rural assessments on the dynamics between women and men at the household and community levels, as well as on the aspects of work related to gender. In response to one of the needs voiced by women, Tambuyog established a savings and credit program to support the creation of new microenterprises. Tambuyog also launched two NGOs in Palawan that increased women's opportunities to participate in decisionmaking related to coastal resource management and to organize and benefit from environmental and health education projects.

In addition, Tambuyog addressed gender concerns within its own institutional operations, devising strategies to integrate gender awareness into its own policies and programs, and developed and tested new economic indicators to evaluate women's participation and status with regard to sustainable development programs. By focusing on long-term processes and combining institutional awareness with local strategies designed to enhance women's positions and participatory skills, Tambuyog successfully put concepts of gender into practice. In turn, this resulted in a new commitment to gender equity in coastal resource management and concrete mechanisms that women can use to assert their rights.

Source: Tambuyog Development Center 1999.

- Empower women to claim a place in local decisionmaking bodies through literacy and advocacy training;
- Assist women in sharing their knowledge of natural resources through civic participation and the development of innovative educational materials and workshops.

In Capim, the most remote of the three communities, the goal was to assess the abundance and value of non-timber resources available in the forest, identify their uses, and find ways to market non-timber forest products as part of a sustainable community development strategy. In Oeiras, the goal was to establish micro-enterprises that utilize non-timber forest resources and generate income. In relatively urban Novo Timboteua, the goal was to raise literacy rates among women, increase their opportunities for strategy-oriented meetings and networking, and expand their participation in public decisionmaking. Central to the project was the chance for cross-fertilization between the three communities and the exchange and integration of the lessons they learned so that the gains for the region were maximized.

The projects thus directly challenged long-running gender-related obstacles to economic advancement. In Capim, traditional patrilineal practices meant that men controlled land and timber and made all decisions related to their use. In Oeiras, where men were traditionally seen as the only "breadwinners" in the family, women were excluded from many economic opportunities and limited in their ability to acquire or develop important business skills. In Novo Timboteua, women were typically excluded from decisionmaking even in organizations that claimed to represent their interests.

The collection of community-relevant information and its provision to community members in a format that was readily applicable to their daily lives was an important component of the project in all three communities. Disseminating that information and the lessons learned then became an important element in the work of the three associations. In Capim, members of the Mothers Club helped to produce a community

training module on natural resource management and an illustrated book entitled, *Frutíferas da Mata na Vida Amazonica*, (“Fruit Trees in the Forest in the Lives of Amazonians”) that other communities could use in their own efforts to achieve sustainable development. The book was widely disseminated in neighboring communities, presented at local fairs and development congresses, shared with other communities overseas through conferences (see box).

In the process of educating others about the value of non-timber forest products, the women of Capim became advocates for preserving the forests that still remained. In September 1998, logging and runaway fires from slash-and-burn practices galvanized women in Capim to demand the right to participate in all decisions affecting land use and sales and to have a say in transforming the way the forest resources were being managed. By demanding that their opinions be heard, women in Capim not only changed the way decisions were made about their own forest resources, but their new advocacy also influenced other communities to make changes in their forest management practices. For example, fire barriers were created to protect

the forest from irresponsible burning practices. In some cases, communities even expelled loggers.

In Oeiras, 60 women were involved in microenterprise projects that relied upon non-timber forest resources. In addition to the collection and sale of forest fruits in regional markets, the women also began processing some into jams and jellies that had a longer shelf life, thus minimizing losses in moving fruit to market. Additionally, the women stored the pulp of some fruits in freezer space loaned to them by the Rural Workers’ Union. This facilitated the sale of fruit juices and pulp when the fruits themselves were out of season, which allowed the women to command premium prices. The women used



Community medicinal plant herbarium in Capim

#### **Frutíferas da Mata na Vida Amazonica, (“Fruit Trees in the Forest in the Lives of Amazonians”)**

This book is the result of seven years of ecological and ethnobotanical research and extension in eastern Amazonia. Results of scientific research are rarely returned to local communities, and the need for such information is far greater than direct outreach efforts can meet. The book is a response to many questions asked by rural peasant farmers in Brazil: What is the monetary value of fruit versus wood? If I sell one hectare of trees to a logger, do I gain or lose? Can I manage *bacuri* seedlings to restore degraded areas?

To answer these and many other questions, the book describes thirteen fruit and medicinal oil species that have broad distribution and economic significance throughout Amazonia. Separate sections describe the ecology, economics, management, nutrition, and use of the trees, many of which have received scant prior study. Combining scientific literature, market data, forest inventory results, lore, and traditional knowledge, the book provides an example of how to return relevant data to communities to assist in improving rural livelihoods and in conserving forest resources.



The principal audience is disenfranchised, rural small landholders who have little access to such information and

need to make quick decisions regarding land-use strategies. Wider interest from the scientific and political communities, and the need for education concerning forest value at all levels of society, make the book useful to Brazilian scientists, policymakers, and urban populations as well. Outside of Brazil, requests for the book have come from Cameroon, Ecuador, Indonesia, and Uganda.

Source: Shanley, Cymerys, and Galvão 1998.



*Members of the Oeiras hammock-making cooperative in front of their work center*

their knowledge of medicinal plants, roots, and bark to process them into medicinal remedies that were less costly than pharmaceutical products. The manufacture of hammocks proved to be one of the most profitable enterprises initiated, and the women quickly learned clever strategies to increase sales and maximize profits. For instance, hammocks were auctioned off through lotteries at public events, allowing a fivefold increase in profits, and a hammock in the colors of the national flag was designed for sale during the World Cup.

Soon, the work of the women of Oeiras began to have an effect both inside and outside the community. The husbands, sons, and brothers of participating women relinquished long-held notions opposed to women working and helped build a center for the production and storage of various products. The Women's Association also held workshops on processing native fruits, medicinal remedies, women's health, and chicken production for women in nearby rural communities. As the Oeiras group spread the word about sustainable forest management, two neighboring communities decided to set aside forest reserves as a first step in the protection of their own natural resources.

The Association of Women of Novo Timboteua, already well organized and affiliated with the statewide organization of women of northeast

Pará, took steps to promote the network of women's groups and to facilitate opportunities for exchanging information and planning for change. The Association provided the means for travel and the supplies required by women attending meetings away from home, and conducted literacy classes that combined reading skills with important concepts about social and economic development. In this way, the Association encouraged critical analysis and built participants' understanding of social and political institutions and processes. Those completing the training are better prepared to participate in the work of the Association and in public decisionmaking about community development.

Each of the women's groups carried out work that reinforced what the other two groups were doing. All were united in saving the rainforest because its non-timber products added value to the quality of their lives and increased their economic and social freedoms. In the process, they became advocates for change in forest management practices and they began to lobby key players at the policy level. In April 1998, the first Environmental Crimes Law was passed in Brazil, making enforcement of earlier environmental statutes mandatory and forcing logging companies to clean up their environmental messes. In July of the same year, the national government announced a \$30 million plan to monitor burnings and create trained fire fighting teams to prevent fires from burning out of control as had happened earlier. The work of grassroots women's organizations such as those in Capim, Oeiras, and Novo Timboteua, coupled with the voices of environmental groups across the country, plays a vital role in defining and implementing sustainable development at the local level and fostering human security for all.

### **CEASDES: Appropriate Technology and Sustainable Development in El Salvador**

In El Salvador, an already fragile natural resource base has been placed under increasing pressure related to poverty, population expansion, and civil conflict. Between 1971 and 1988, the country's population expanded by 36 percent while its cultivated land area increased by only 7 percent (Gammage et al. 1999). Residents of



rural areas have historically been challenged by a chronic shortage of land and, as timber resources have declined due to deforestation, they have had to travel further and further afield to find fuelwood. With a change in government policies in 1992 to make the gathering of all but dry wood illegal, fuelwood collectors—both women and men—have had to search for dry wood or resort to clandestine strategies.

To conduct its initiative in El Salvador in 1997–99, the *Centro de Estudios Ambientales y Sociales para el Desarrollo Sostenible* (CEASDES) (“The Center on Environmental and Social Studies for Sustainable Development”) solicited participation from community members in carrying out baseline research and in developing an appropriate technology intervention to reduce fuelwood consumption. CEASDES is an NGO that conducts participatory research and disseminates information on the links between people and the

ecosystems in which they live. It also provides support to communities and policymakers to promote sustainable resource use.

El Tamarindo, the site of the PROWID project, is a small coastal community situated at the mouth of an estuary in the Salvadoran reaches of the Gulf of Fonseca. Like many coastal communities, it has an important and delicately balanced relationship with the mangrove and brackish forests surrounding the community. Mangroves are rich in flora and fauna (including the lucrative shrimp and fish populations that feed communities and contribute to export revenue) while providing barrier protection, drainage, and filtration that serve to stabilize the coastline and adjacent agricultural lands. Approximately 112,000 Salvadoran families depend directly on 26,772 hectares of mangrove forests for timber, fuelwood, and plant, fish, and animal life (Gammage et al. 1999).

### Promoting Sustainability in the El Chile Biological Reserve in Honduras

Communities living in the buffer zone surrounding the El Chile Biological Reserve in Honduras rely on agricultural activities, cattle ranching, and the felling of trees for lumber and fuelwood for their economic livelihood. All of these pursuits contribute to ecological deterioration around the reserve. To explore the role of gender in determining how households and communities use natural resources, and how they can adopt more sustainable practices, the Department of Anthropology at the University of Maryland and World Neighbors in Honduras collaborated to collect information that could be used to develop community-based interventions.

Three communities around El Chile were the focus of a baseline survey of natural resources and socioeconomic conditions and of a household questionnaire on socio-demographics and agricultural practices. Interviews and meetings with residents, as well as spot observations, contributed to the study. Following Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the project team conducted emergency relief work in the villages, and later expanded its data collection to reflect the event’s impact on households and individuals. The work brought researchers and villagers closer together and facilitated greater local participation in the project.



Planning baseline survey in El Chile

The collected data revealed that both men and women are involved in agriculture, but that gender-based divisions exist with regard to specific activities. For example, teenage girls collect water while boys collect fuelwood, and men are active in subsistence crop production doing weeding, planting, harvesting, and threshing while women help transport the harvest to the household compound, shell beans, and husk maize. With regard to livestock, men tend to care for animals that feed outside the compound (e.g., horses and mules) while women care for livestock living inside (e.g., chickens and pigs), though both sexes share in caring for cows and bulls. The project elucidated the ways in which communities dependent on natural resources have adapted to a steadily declining resource base, and provided evidence regarding the need to consider gender difference when developing interventions to mitigate the decline.

Source: University of Maryland and World Neighbors 1999.

In recent years, excessive demand for firewood, illegal logging and timber sales, migration to coastal areas, and conversion of land to aquaculture ponds (e.g., for raising shrimp) have led to an unprecedented loss of mangroves. The consequences of such loss are different for men and women, who play distinct roles with regard to mangrove use. For example, while the majority of residents pursue fishing or fishing-related activities, men most often fish in the open seas while women fish in the estuaries or along the shoreline and gather crustaceans and shellfish. In 1997, men on average earned 624.79 colones (about US\$72) per week on fishing and sales, whereas women only earned 238.75 colones (about US\$28) on average from fishing, fish processing, and sales.<sup>8</sup> In a baseline survey carried out by CEASDES, 60 percent of community respondents claimed to have purchased the fuelwood they consumed, but 23 percent said they gathered it and 6 percent alternated between gathering and buying depending on their financial resources at the time (Gammage et al. 1999).

Because wood is gathered, stored, and burned for cooking and heat by both men and women, if women only had been targeted for the intervention, critical gender-related aspects of fuelwood collection, consumption, and household decisionmaking might have been missed. Moreover, the decision to participate in the intervention was one that could not be made by one person in isolation from the rest of the household, since it required a commitment to try a new appropriate technology, payment of a minimal amount toward the cost of the stove (between 70-100 colones out of a total 400 colones for the base or 1,200 colones for all materials, labor and tiles), and a contribution of household labor in building the stove.<sup>9</sup>

The process began when community members, through consultations, interviews, and focus groups, were asked to identify environmental issues that most affected them. Out of several

issues identified earlier (including lack of potable water and problems related to waste and sewage disposal), the focus groups ranked scarcity of fuelwood and timber as the leading environmental problem for the community. The next step was for community members to select an appropriate technology to replace their open-pit cooking fires.

The PROWID project combined research with a community-based intervention to replace open firepits with fuel-efficient stoves that use less wood.<sup>10</sup> Sixty households were randomly selected to receive the new stoves from a total sample of 140 households in the baseline survey. In order to track and evaluate the impact of the intervention on the lives and fuelwood consumption of the adopters, they were matched by family profile, socioeconomic indicators, and fuel consumption with a control group of households that did not adopt the new stove initially. Households in the control group received new stoves at the end of the project.

Results of the appropriate technology intervention (the Finlandia stove) depended on two indicators to evaluate its success: a reduction in fuelwood consumption and reduced expenses of those households that reported purchasing fuelwood. The research team made three assessments of fuelwood consumption for households that used fuelwood strictly for domestic purposes. One assessment was made at the beginning of the intervention in April 1998 (dry season), another in August (wet season), and a final one in November (dry season) of the same year.

Data revealed that households with Finlandia stoves consume less fuelwood per capita than those with traditional stoves. For example, per capita weekly fuelwood consumption for domestic purposes was about six pounds less during one of the dry seasons and five pounds less during one of the wet seasons. Additionally, households with the new stoves spend less in

<sup>8</sup> Based on an exchange rate of US\$1 = 8.68 colones (July 2000).

<sup>9</sup> The selection of project beneficiaries was, in part, determined by socioeconomic status. Those who had thatched-roofed houses or whose houses were too small to accommodate the new stove, which included a chimney, were excluded from the pool of possible recipients of the intervention. However, some of those excluded became part of the control group.

<sup>10</sup> The stove model, which was selected by the El Tamarindo community from a number of alternatives was the Finlandia stove because it is more adaptable to individual household needs, including the size of cooking pots used, space for cooking and food preparation, and the needs of those who use it. In addition, it is easy to maintain and keep clean.

total and less per capita on fuelwood than households without them.

Qualitative differences also surfaced in focus group discussions with adopters. In these groups, women related that the ease of cooking two or three dishes simultaneously saved fuelwood, and allowed more time for other activities. In addition, because Finlandia stoves include a flue and chimney in the design, they expose the users to less smoke and ash (which tends to accumulate in houses with traditional open cooking fires) and contribute to a lower incidence of respiratory and bronchial ailments. In addition, those using the stove and children in the household were less likely to be burned because flames were contained in a closed area.

In short, the appropriate technology intervention was successful because members of the community, especially women, were invited to participate in all stages of the project, from helping to identify appropriate measures in the baseline survey to suggesting variables that should be taken into consideration in evaluating the intervention. This helped to sustain community interest in the intervention over time and make it meaningful in the context of people's daily lives.

Equal to their increased community participation, women learned new skills through the project. For example, they learned how to measure consumption of fuelwood, how to build the stoves (including masonry), how to cook on them optimizing their effectiveness by cooking several things simultaneously, and how to maintain them. In the process, women adopters became advocates of the new stove, offering to teach other women and men how to make and use them. In some cases where women used their stoves to produce food for sale, they also benefited from increased income.



*Woman preparing a meal in her kitchen using the Finlandia stove in El Tamarindo*

In summary, one of the aspects that is essential to fulfilling women's rights and enhancing their economic options is the freedom to live in a secure, sustainable environment. As the projects described in this section demonstrate, the participation of women in planning and carrying out baseline research, as well as participating in the choice and implementation of a natural resource management interventions enhances this freedom. Through a variety of means—including community education and organization, gains won from sustainable practices, and the application of appropriate technology benefiting households and communities—women rose to more prominent positions in their communities. The knowledge that women gained about their local environment and conservation, coupled with new-found self-confidence and their ability to help bring about positive change, contributed to innovative, effective approaches to the use of land and natural resources that integrated gender equity with principles of sustainable development.

# Conclusions



**T**he results and lessons about women's economic roles and advancement derived from the projects summarized above, combined with the findings of other PROWID projects that have addressed different sectors and aspects of women's lives (e.g., health, political participation, and domestic violence), argue for a comprehensive and multisectoral approach to development.<sup>11</sup> Expanding the opportunities of women in one area (e.g., education) serves to increase options and promise gains in other areas as well (e.g., economic status), and women's well-being is enhanced while their ability to assume active roles in promoting change is increased. This suggests a simultaneous and mutually reinforcing improvement in the well-being of women and in their exercise of free agency to bring about change.

The reinforcing relationship between well-being and agency is similar to that between human rights and development, in the sense that securing human rights can help to manifest development while at the same time progress made through development can help to realize various human rights. Few of the PROWID projects set out explicitly from the perspective of human rights but focused instead on the economic condition of women. However, the projects revealed strategies that make it possible to identify and understand the constraints to women's economic advancement and to promote social and political change to eliminate those constraints. To promote women's economic well-being and their ability to act as agents of change required fundamental shifts in gender relations and societal recognition of their rights to make decisions concerning their own welfare, actions, and lives.

This phenomenon alludes to something that Sen refers to as the "preventive role of democracy" (Sen 1999). With expansion of the range of instruments and options that individuals can adopt to participate in public decisionmaking and the democratic processes of their communities and nations, individuals will become more capable and the collective well-being of society will increase. Sen characterizes these as freedoms that incorporate both rights and responsibilities, including political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security.

## Women's Agency and Social Change

"These different aspects (women's earning power, economic role outside the family, literacy and education, property rights and so on) may at first sight appear to be rather diverse and disparate. But what they all have in common is their positive contribution in adding force to women's voice and agency—through independence and empowerment. For example, working outside the home and earning an independent income tend to have a clear impact on enhancing the social standing of a woman in the household and the society. Her contribution to the prosperity of the family is then more visible, and she also has more voice, because of being less dependent on others. Further, outside employment often has useful 'educational' effects, in terms of exposure to the world outside the household, making her agency more effective. Similarly, women's education strengthens women's agency and also tends to make it more informed and skilled. The ownership of property can also make women more powerful in family decisions."

Source: Sen 1999 (pp. 191-192)

<sup>11</sup> Findings from all of the PROWID projects can be found on the PROWID web site at [www.icrw.org](http://www.icrw.org) or [www.cedpa.org](http://www.cedpa.org) and in documents available from ICRW or CEDPA.



The examples from PROWID cited above provide evidence of the importance of such freedoms and of the ways in which they complement one another. Many of the constraints addressed by these projects relate to social and political factors that impede women's economic advancement, and the strategies for change that they pursued offer guidance to others who are seeking ways to promote women in development and the full range of human rights therein. That many of these projects sought to achieve change through grassroots organizing and community-based initiatives underscores the importance of individual and collective activism working toward long-term change.

Removing constraints to women's economic advancement requires, among other things, changing long-held attitudes and social norms, which can be a very slow and unpredictable process. The results, some of which may be unanticipated, are often difficult to measure according to performance criteria frequently applied by funders.

Many of the PROWID projects were designed to support activities over two years within the framework of the four-year grants program. In most cases, this relatively short timeframe precluded realization of significant institutional change at a national level. They did, however,

set in motion a train of events that prompted community, regional, and even national attention to structural realities and disparities in access to and control over resources and decisionmaking. Moreover, they generated actions aimed at breaking down barriers preventing women's realization of the rights and freedoms necessary for their economic advancement.

In many cases, *process* itself (in this case, expanding women's agency) represented both the means and the end. It was important that individuals and communities find ways in which to document gaps, discuss causes, and explore new directions collaboratively in order to determine paths to economic advancement that promote the well-being of all community members and capitalize upon the capabilities of all members as active agents of change. It is equally necessary to foster links with governments, media, and businesses. Access to information, free participation in dialogue, and representation in decisionmaking – whether in the community or the capital – proved to be fundamental to the success of projects. This suggests the important links between democratic principles and economic prosperity, which in turn support the vital relationship between human rights and development.

# Recommendations and Lessons Learned

## Recommendations



Human capabilities bear directly on the well-being and freedom of people and indirectly influence social change and economic production (Sen 1999). Given the results of the PROWID projects that sought ultimately to promote women's well-being, the following recommendations emerge to strengthen human capabilities and foster responsive institutions:

- **Engage women as well as men in defining action plans and projects that reflect their local realities and strategic interests.**

Project design and implementation should relate closely to the experiences and conditions of target communities. Organizations and their initiatives will be more likely to promote gender equity if they work *with* women rather than *for* them, incorporate their realities, and involve them in determining priorities and exercising leadership. This approach capitalizes upon and promotes women's agency and recognizes their role in social transformation, as well as their right to participation in government and equal access to public services.

For example, GEM recognized that in implementing its social enterprise program, the participating regional centers should tailor projects to the particular needs of the women in each locality. As a result, women undertook enterprises that reflected the resource base at their disposal, their individual interests, and local market demand. In the case of the CEASDES project, women were included from the outset in identifying community problems, determining an appropriate intervention, and implementing

a plan of action and evaluation that led directly to improvements in the quality of life for women, their households, and the broader community. PROWID projects demonstrate the value of participatory techniques as a means to ensure that an intervention will engage community members as agents of change and that the activities undertaken will have an appropriate and enduring effect in terms of increased well-being.

- **Include relevant training and capacity building when designing programs in order to bolster individual and organizational capabilities needed to promote women's agency.**

In many areas of the world, women have been so thoroughly excluded from social, economic, and political processes that they may lack the skills required to effectively plan and carry out change-oriented strategies and engage institutions that impede their advancement. Likewise, organizations that serve women may lack the capacity to link their immediate programmatic concerns with the broader social and political contexts that define women's experiences and that often marginalize such institutions. Some organizations may find the need to sharpen their own internal management and program operations before proceeding to broader aims, something that project managers and funding organizations alike should take into account.

For example, microfinance institutions that serve women entrepreneurs need strong financial management skills in order to maximize the reach and effectiveness of their services. Friends of Women's World Banking/India saw the need for increased managerial capacity among its microfinance affiliates and established a series of

training sessions on strategic business planning to build stronger and more extensive financial services for women. Likewise, building staff and participant skills in research and systematic analysis strengthened the learning and organizational capacity of GEM and its regional centers and contributed to the identification and pursuit of new employment opportunities for women.

● **Create meaningful changes in women's economic status through fundamental shifts in the policy context.**

Efforts to improve women's economic capabilities are often met with great resistance in policymaking arenas. This may be associated with deeply held beliefs about "appropriate" roles for women and the intersection of their productive and reproductive activities within the context of the household and the community. Addressing this sort of opposition requires demonstrating that economic development is not a zero-sum game, and that benefits realized by women do not have to derive from sacrifices made by men. Indeed, the important point to make is that the advancement of women's economic capabilities benefits all members of society. Organizations working to promote women's capacities and rights can further their cause by engaging effectively in advocacy strategies that link field-level findings to the broader social and political context that they seek to influence. This involves identifying and engaging the relevant policy actors, building constituencies, and working to advance the notion of win-win strategies. In cases where organizations and individuals lack basic information about the policy process and the relevant conceptual and analytical tools, seminars and workshops on advocacy and leadership can provide a forum for discussion and identification of common concerns.

● **Use both qualitative and quantitative instruments to assess women's economic status and the effects of changes in policies and programs.**

While changes in many measures of women's well-being lend themselves to quantitative analysis, many of the changes required to promote women's agency are related to social norms and biases, the effects of which may not

be readily quantified. Skillful qualitative analysis is required to assess changes in attitudes, beliefs, and awareness, for example when measuring women's leadership and entrepreneurial capabilities to initiate and sustain an enterprise or when documenting gender-related differences in opinions on community development priorities. This requires a variety of research and analytical instruments, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation techniques that must be backed up by theoretical analysis, careful definition of indicators, and systematic monitoring.

For example, SEWA sought to measure not only the changes in women's income as they organized their productive activities but also to record changes in women's perceptions of themselves and the quality of their lives. Indicators in the pictorial diaries were developed to record both changes in women's resources and in their satisfaction with life, helping them to establish the linkage between their ability to control productive assets (i.e., exercise their agency) and the improved well-being of themselves and their households. In the case of Via Campesina, the project led to changes in women's understanding of global market forces on local economies and production and to their increased awareness of patterns of gender-based discrimination in agricultural markets and rural organizations. This new knowledge allowed the women collectively to propose gender-sensitive reforms in institutional practices of organizations representing their interests at regional and international levels. While the change in awareness and the increase in women's leadership may be hard to quantify, the increased presence of women in the operations and programs of Via Campesina, and the organization's consequent attention to gender, are evidence of the gains made.

● **Collect sex-disaggregated data to help define gender differences and support gender analysis.**

Women experience the impact of development processes in ways that differ from those experienced by men due to their histories, roles, and social relationships. Well-grounded gender analysis that explores the relationships of women

and men in society, the inequalities of those relationships, and the interactions between the public and private spheres in shaping them is central to promoting equality between the sexes.<sup>12</sup> Sex-disaggregated data is required in order to measure these relationships and to develop strategies to redress power imbalances. Development projects that aim to increase the number of female beneficiaries or provide more economic opportunities for women will not be able to demonstrate their effect without a way to systematically measure sex-based differences along economic and social indicators. Women should be included when defining indicators and gathering performance data to ensure accuracy and relevance. Government agencies, research institutes, and service-based NGOs should collect sex-disaggregated data to monitor trends and to design and promote more gender-sensitive policies and programs.

In the case of CEASDES, for instance, data on the gathering and consumption of firewood reflected the different gender-based realities and incentives that men and women face in relation to the community's economy, which directly influenced the nature of the intervention that the community then designed. Collecting sex-disaggregated data throughout the intervention allowed for a clear understanding of the ways in which the project improved the lives of women and gave the participants solid evidence when representing their findings to other communities and government officials interested in promoting sustainable gender-equitable development elsewhere.

● **Observe and uphold the rights and obligations detailed in international human rights treaties as a means to promote the economic advancement of women.**

The world no longer lacks the instruments required to define and protect the human rights of all people. However, knowing how to put the aims of treaties and conventions into practice and finding the political will to do so remain challenges before the international community.

States that are parties to the various human rights treaties have an obligation to recognize when public policy may run counter to the principles enshrined in the documents and take measures to revise legislative guidelines and practices to conform with those principles. States should also work in harmony with non-state actors to foster a greater understanding of human rights, develop institutions that offer safeguards, and facilitate an economic environment that respects and promotes human rights.

For example, the Centre for Rural Legal Studies developed a collaborative relationship with government departments to increase their understanding of human rights, develop indicators measuring treaty compliance, and promote policies on land tenure and rural affairs that respected and protected women's rights related to land and employment. The Centre also engaged rural women's organizations and local NGOs in an education and advocacy campaign highlighting the rights of women farmworkers and the ways in which civil society organizations might work in partnership with the government to plan and carry out local interventions promoting equitable development for women.

In a similar manner, CENWOR established a broad-based steering committee that included members of relevant government ministries and NGOs to address women's unequal access to training opportunities and the consequent constraints on their employment options. After documenting women's inability to realize their right to work as they might choose or to gain the requisite technical and vocational training, CENWOR then engaged all stakeholders (from girls to ministers) in a campaign to change accepted norms, revise public policies, and expand training options for girls and women. By involving both state and non-state actors, those who enjoy the right and those charged with upholding its obligations are joined in a mutually reinforcing partnership as agents of change.

<sup>12</sup> For further information about gender analysis frameworks, refer to March et al. 1999.

## Lesson

Findings from the project experiences summarized in this paper suggest the following lesson for organizations conducting programs to strengthen women's economic capacities and for the funding community that supports them:

- **Information is a vital resource for communities formulating development strategies and action plans for change.**

While this is not a new revelation, its value is worth highlighting. In conducting action-oriented research, the quality and accessibility of information and its application through advocacy are of fundamental importance. Given deeply embedded (and often unconscious) patterns of discrimination against women, the role of information assumes an even higher level of strategic importance related to documenting and explaining gender-based differences, particularly when seeking to ensure accountability for human rights obligations. When organizations take steps to make basic data and findings about their communities understandable, accessible, and relevant to circumstances on the ground, local capabilities are enhanced and individuals become more skillful agents of

**"Eradication of poverty based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice requires the involvement of women in economic and social development, equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centered sustainable development."**

*Source:* United Nations 1996.

change. In some cases, gathering and interpreting information about their surroundings helps community members recognize important links between their collective assets and their options for new economic activities that will ensure sustainable development. In other cases, communities can use information to inform others through educational outreach, organizational networks, and advocacy activities that can help generate the social and political capital necessary to pursue policy reform. The key is the nature and application of information and free access to it by individuals and communities. As information technologies continue to tie distant points closer together, the importance of information and access will grow.

# Appendix

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**In addition, for more information on the projects discussed in this paper, the following Reports-in-Brief can be ordered from ICRW or CEDPA, or can be accessed on-line at either organization ([www.icrw.org](http://www.icrw.org) or [www.cedpa.org](http://www.cedpa.org)):**

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